3:Nash E-5 (1964-1965) 1967
[p.455-A)
NV9 Tzeltal NV9
Teklum

Death as a Way of Life: The Increasing Resort to Homicide in a Maya Indian Community[1]

JUNE NASH
Yale University

The breaking down of a social-control system based on belief in the guardianship of the spiritual ancestors and their temporal agents, the curers, is reflected in a rising homicide rate as people turn to individual sanctions when threatened. The acts of homicide differ in their social significance according to who is killed, the context, the agency, and the motivation of the killer. Thirty-seven homicides between 1938 and 1965, analyzed in terms of these component variables, reflect the conflicts arising from competition in new economic enterprises, the rising suspicion of curers' abuse of their supernatural power, and the loss of belief in the guardianship of the ancestors.

THE social impact of homicide has caused some analysts[2] to treat it and its supposed inverted complement, suicide, as one kind of behavior with a single meaning, ignoring Durkheim's caveat that behavioral rubrics categorize diverse phenomena. Here I shall analyze the variety of strategies involved in killing in a Mexican community, which I shall call Teklum (the Tzeltal term for village), and endeavor to show how rules of behavior are expressed in killing and in attempts to avoid being killed. Further, I shall endeavor to point out what these indicate about structural and organizational changes both within the community and in its relations with the wider society. Since suicide is absent, except for a single case of a madman, I have restricted my enquiry to homicide.

Teklum is a predominantly Indian township of Mexico. The population of the town center—about 1,900—includes only one Ladino, or non-Indian, family, that of the schoolteacher. The sense of community is limited to people living in the center and in the four nearby hamlets (*barrios*).

The town center is divided physically and socially into two endogamous sections, called "upper" and "lower." The outlying hamlets are linked to the nearest section by social and economic ties. The civil and religious posts of the town are, in local theory, apportioned evenly between the sections. This was in fact true until the 1950's; for each of the ranked posts had a paired complement, so that both sides of the dual division were represented, and the single posts of president and *síndico* (the president's administrative assistant) were al-

4: Villa Rojas E-4,5 (1938-1944) 1969 NV9 Tzeltal NV9

9. The Tzeltal

ALFONSO VILLA ROJAS

flows through the eastern part of the region, the latter through the western, both draining large basins.

According to the census of 1950, the population of the zone totals 76,617 individuals, distributed over 15,970 sq. km. Of these 49,053 persons are Indian, 27,564 are Ladino. This population is distributed according to Table 1.

San Cristobal de las Casas is omitted from the table because its population is predominantly Ladino (19,758 individuals) and because the Indians who live there (3,296) are of the Tzotzil tongue. Socoltenango and Nicolas Ruiz are also omitted because they no longer have an Indian-speaking population.

The central region has the municipalities of the highest density of population: Oxchuc with 129 inhabitants per sq. km., and Tenejapa with 115. The northern part has an area seven times as large with only twice as much population; the municipality of Ocosingo has hardly one inhabitant per sq. km. in spite of the fact that its lands are the most fertile of the entire region. Although it

[P. 195-B]
TEXT CONTINUED ON PAGE 196-B

4: Villa Rojas E-4,5 (1938-1944) 1969 NV9 Tzeltal NV9

161
162
103
131
197
631

TABLE 1—DISTRIBUTION OF THE POPULATION BY MUNICIPALITIES
(Census of 1950)

Municipalities	Area in sq. km.	Tzeltal-speakers	Spanish-speakers	Total Population
North Zone:				
Sitala	550	5,435	1,385	6,821
Yajalon	145	6,026	4,010	10,036
Chilon	462	9,049	2,070	11,118
Ocosingo	12,143	9,170	3,770	12,940
Subtotal	13,300	29,680	11,235	40,915
Central Zone:				
Chanal	192	2,328	553	2,881
Oxchuc	42	4,074	1,338	5,412
Tenejapa	67	6,215	1,535	7,750
Altamirano	1,559	2,945	1,810	4,655
Subtotal	1,860	15,462	5,236	20,698
South Zone:				
Teopisca	270	754	4,601	5,355
Amatenango	355	1,773	756	2,529
Pinola	185	1,364	5,736	7,120
Subtotal	810	3,911	11,093	15,004
GRAND TOTAL	15,970	49,053	27,564	76,617

162
191
631

TABLE 2—SPEAKERS OF TZELTAL
(Distribution by Zones)

Zones	Monolingual	Bilingual	Total
North Zone	23,429	8,251	31,680
Central Zone	11,291	4,171	15,462
South Zone	323	3,588	3,911
TOTAL	35,043	16,010	51,053

[P. 196-A]

Although it
[161] has an average of 19 inhabitants per sq. km.
[241] the southern zone has lands that are suitable
[631] for agriculture and for irrigation, such as in
[128] Amatenango. Later I shall discuss the influence of these factors on the uneven economic and social development of the three zones.

161 The figures on Indians are based exclu-
162 sively on use of the Indian language and
197 so include both monolinguals and bilin-
191 guals. To differentiate each group, however, I have made corrections based on field work as shown in Table 2.

141 The average height of these Indians ranges from 1.55 to 1.60 m. Referring to

[P. 196 - B]

5: Blom & LaFarge A,E-4,5 (1925) 1927 NV9 Tzeltal NV9
Prehistoric Yucatan NV3

CHAPTER XI

PINES

T 137 Our trail wound through low bush and second growth. Here and there on hills were islands of high forest, but the level ground formerly under cultivation was now covered with an impenetrable network of low bushes and thorny brambles.

T 241 Indian agriculture is very simple. Towards the end of the dry season the Indian selects a place in the forest for his corn field, and makes an extensive clearing. All trees and branches are cut in small pieces, and left to dry in the baking sun. When thoroughly dry they set fire to them, and in a short while the ground is clear, leaving it as clean as a floor.

Then the Indian plants his corn in holes made with a wooden digging stick. He sows just before the rainy season sets in and waters his field, and thereafter he has nothing to do until it is time to harvest. The ground is never broken, and no fertilizer is used.

This method is very wasteful. Three to four plantings can be made in the same clearing, after which the soil is burnt out and exhausted. Then a new place must be found for the field.

T 161 PY 174 166 241 PY [721] In this way great tracts gradually become waste land. Today the population is scarce, and the damage is therefore comparatively small; but before the Conquest the population must have been much greater, judging by the many and large ruined cities. In those days the Maya undoubtedly first cultivated the lands near his town, and as the soil became exhausted, moved farther away. Then one fine day the distance from field to town became so great, the labour of cultivating the distant field and transporting the crops so excessive, that he was forced to look for new country. Very likely the inhabitants of one city would invade the territory of a neighbouring city in their search for cultivable land and this would result in war.

PY 172 174 131 167 361 Dates inscribed on monuments show us that the Maya for some reason abandoned the southern part of their country around the year 600 A. D. After 630 A. D., we find no more dates in this, the Old Empire area, as it has been called; but about the same time dated monuments appear in northern Yucatan.

A general exodus from the southern area must have started at this time, and little by little, tribe after tribe went north, leaving their magnificent cities to a few stragglers—eventually to be claimed

5: Blom & LaFarge A,E-4,5 (1925) 1927 NV9 Tzeltal NV9
Bachajón

131 the Guatemala border, which it overlaps at Gracias á Dios. They
101 do not reach the highest part of the mountains. For the most part, they live in isolated tribal groups, although in some places, notably in Ocosingo Valley, they are attached to *haciendas* and *fincas*. Much of the easternmost country marked in the maps as belonging to them and the Chol is actually uninhabited wilderness, or, if occupied at all, is Lacandone territory.

101 Their immediate neighbours of the Highlands are the Zotzil and
197 Chaneabal. The former speak a language differentiated from Tzeltal only by a shift of *a, e,* and *b* to Zotzil *o, i,* and *m,* respectively.* Chaneabal is spoken by a small group near Comitan. The people of that place say that the language is simply Tzeltal influenced by Mames contact. The list given in Appendix III, seems to bear this out. To the north, and around Tumbalá, are the Chol Indians, whose language is quite distinct, but, of all the other Mayance tongues, probably the nearest to the Highland group.

197 The language itself has been variously named Cendal, Tzendal, Cendales, Tzental, and Tzeltal. I have taken the latter form, as it most nearly represents the Indians' own form, *ts'eltal,* varied in careless speech to *tceltal.* The villages are spoken of as tribes, be-
197 cause each one forms a separate, self-governing unit. There is no
628 evidence of cohesion within the language-group as a whole save during certain periods of uprisings. Individual villages may resemble tribes of another speech more closely than they do those of
[104] their own. The Mexican spelling of Tzeltal names is given first, followed by the phonetic spelling (See Appendix III), and the translation, if known.

101 The Bachajon live on the threshold of the pine country. Their
[131] farms may be found hidden away in the thick jungle land of ma-
[137] hogany and palms, through which their little hidden trails lead to houses tucked away out of sight of alien travelers. Altogether, they
[161] are estimated at five thousand families, but it is doubtful whether evidences of more than fifty farms could be seen by one passing along the trail through the heart of their country. The capital,
[648] Bachajon Village, is among the pines. There, periodically, the Spaniards used to round them up, that they might be more easily policed, and for the benefit of the church established there. Once
[346] there was a fine, stone church and a neat Cabildo with white walls,
[344] colonnade, and tiled roof. Both have been wrecked by the Indians, apparently because they did not like to be reminded of alien domination, for from the wreckage of the old church, they took tiles to roof their new one, and they have a straw-thatched Cabildo for the Maestro, or government agent.

*Starr (1903) quoting Sanchez (1890).

7: Nash E-5 (1957-1967) 1970 NV9 Tzeltal NV9
Amatenango del Valle

tóbal. The altitude above sea level varies from 2,000 meters in the hilly periphery to 1,720 meters in the valley where the town center is located. Ejido lands acquired in the 1930s have extended the boundaries of the township to lower lands at 1,500 meters altitude.

Pre-Conquest settlement patterns in the Chiapas highlands were characterized by independent communities occupying the headlands around flat-bottomed valleys (R. M. Adams 1961:341). The choice of sites seems to have been based on defense against invading Toltec or other conquest groups (Calnek 1962:25). The sites investigated by Adams and Culbert (R. M. Adams 1961:347) in Amatenango belong to the late-Classic and early post-Classic period. They were marginal to the centers of Maya civilization in the Yucatán peninsula and Guatemala. Test excavations in the modern town indicate that it was occupied only after colonial times.

The town of Amatenango del Valle is first mentioned in the year 1528 when it was included in tribute lists with both the Nahuatl name, Amatenango, and the Tzeltal name, Tzobontaghal (Calnek n.d.). The tribute lists of 1761 include 33 families in the *parcialidad*, or Spanish political unit based on an indigenous settlement, of Zacatepec in Amatenango and 75 families in the parcialidad of Amatenango (Trens 1957 I:217). The first census done in 1778 shows a total population of 576, with 374 men and 202 women. The racial breakdown is listed as 8 white, 2 negro and mestizo, and 560 Indians (Trens 1957:221). By 1824, the population had increased to 1,620. The present population of 3,179 represents natural growth as well as inclusion of additional outlying settlements added in the latter part of the nineteenth century and during the 1930s with the enactment of the land reform act. The population changes indicate steady but not great increases. The capacity of the town to incorporate additional population has probably passed its peak. The present trend is for out-migration to newly opened ejido lands.

The subdivisions of the town, which provide the framework for administration by the national government, are included in Table 1.

The center. The center of Tzo'ontahal is called the "center [or navel] of the world." The residents of the center, with the exception of the schoolteacher's family, are all Indian. Although the town center forms

[TEXT CONTINUED ON PAGE 5]

7: Nash E-5 (1957-1967) 1970 NV9 Tzeltal NV9
Amatenango del Valle

TABLE 1. Population of Political Subdivisions of the Township of Amatenango del Valle

Name of subdivision	*Men*	*Women*	*Total*
Center			
Tzo?ontahal	938	894	1,832
Colonias			
Bočibal	109	113	222
Te?tikil	81	91	172
Pathuitz	36	30	66
San Caralampio	50	46	96
San Vicente	46	48	94
Ranchos and rancherías			
Buena Vista	1	5	6
Candelaria	5	3	8
Carmen	8	9	17
Carmen las Delicias	6	7	13
Cruz Quemada	5	10	15
El Porvenir	12	13	25
El Rabinal	11	9	20
El Rosario	12	17	29
La Esperanza	3	6	9
La Libertad	3	4	7
La Merced Buena Vista	4	5	9
Llano Grande	11	16	27
Porvenir	2	6	8
Rosario Tulanca	3	2	5
San Agustín	11	9	20
San Antonio Buena Vista (a)	63	76	139
San Antonio Buena Vista (b)	12	7	19
San Caralampio	8	9	17
San José Cruz Quemada	14	14	28
San José La Reforma	10	10	20
San José Yujulum	10	8	18
San Pedro Soledad	12	10	22
San Ramon Buena Vista	4	5	9
San Salvador	12	11	23
San Sebastian	1	1	2
Santa Anita	6	3	9
Santiago Buena Vista	11	10	21
Tulanca	5	6	11
Fincas			
San Nicolás	26	28	54
Tejonera	8	5	13
Total	1,559	1,546	3,105

SOURCE: 1960 census.

7: Nash E-5 (1957-1967) 1970 NV9 Tzeltal NV9
Amatenango del Valle

were not affected by the congregación. The fact that there is no mention in the post-Conquest documents of the introduction of dual divisions suggests that the model was indigenous to the area.

The Indians of Tzo'ontahal state that the dividing line of the division was established in its present position when a new church, replacing the first one which was burned, was built on the present site. Judging from a date carved in a beam of the church, this must have been about the year 1746. The endogamous restriction on marriage has not led to a sense of racial distinction between the two populations. Both groups feel that they are descendants of the same ancestor figures and under their guardianship. The same Tzeltal patronyms are distributed on both sides of the division, although there is a clustering of some of them on one or another side. Table 2 shows the distribution of patronyms of 714 male and female adults; 88 percent of the patronyms are found in both divisions.[4]

The functions of the division in organizing social groupings have been eroded, but some survive. Equal representation by civil officials from the upper and lower sections, when there are two or more posts at the same rank, is still in effect. The principle of alternation of the single posts of president and *síndico*, his administrative assistant, so that one term the incumbent is chosen from Ahk'olnantik and the following term from Alannantik has not been a decisive factor since the 1930s, when Indian communities were being drawn into more active participation in national programs of change (Chapter 9).

Residential expansion within the center has been almost entirely in Ahk'olnantik because of the addition of ejido lands formerly belonging to the finca of San Nicolás on this side of town. This one-sided increase in population finally resulted, in 1965, in a breakdown of the principle of equal representation in the ceremonial posts involving high expenses, those of the four *alfereces*. Although attempts were made to find candidates in Alannantik, there were no men with sufficient funds who had not

4. Carrasco (n.d.:5) quotes a document in the *Archivo General de Indias de Sevilla, Guatemala* 16 indicating that Spanish patronyms were given to the heads of calpules and that these were to be extended to all members of the calpul. The present distribution of name groups in the dual divisions cannot support this, nor can it refute the possibility that Spanish patronyms were related to some larger kin or territorial grouping more than three hundred years ago.

7: Nash E-5 (1957-1967) 1970 NV9 Tzeltal NV9
Amatenango del Valle

621
178
794
161

held that post formerly, and all four alfereces were for the first time taken from one side.

621
551

TABLE 2. Patronyms in the Dual Division

Patronym	*Alannantik only*	*Ahk'olnantik only*	*Alannantik and Ahk'olnantik*
Alvarez			37
Arguella Jimenez	1		
Bautista		1	
Bautista Čail			52
Bautista Čo		5	
Bautista Ko?ton			14
Bautista Sa?ben			20
Cepeda			1
Cepeda Čilol			29
Cruz Mendez	1		
Diaz			6
Diaz Čamo			5
Diaz Ton			8
Diaz Uz			42
Gomez		2	
Gomez Bot			39
Gomez Kompaš			73
Gomez Kut			49
Gomez Waris	1		
Gonzalez	1		
Gonzalez Ikob		3	
Guitierrez	1		
Hernandez	1		
Hernandez Čela	1		
Hernandez Tenan	4	1	
Jimenez		2	
Leon		2	
Leon Či			21
Leon Čulik			14
Leon Malatz	2		
Lopez			1
Lopez Lab'	1		
Lopez Lin			31
Lopez Mai	11		
Lopez Pokoš		13	
Lopez Tapiya		5	
Lopez Šunton		18	

7: Nash E-5 (1957-1967) 1970 NV9 Tzeltal NV9
Amatenango del Valle

maximum market price for wheat of 124 pesos per 100 kgs. The Indians usually sell their wheat at 90 pesos per 100 kgs. to Teopisca truckers, or at best gain 110 pesos per 100 kgs. by bringing it to the mills themselves. From their perspective corn is the more valuable crop, not only from the point of view of subsistence, but also for sale since if they hold it in storage they can sell it at double the price at which the values are calculated in the census (.60 peso per kg.). They do not have facilities to store wheat in order to take maximum advantage of price changes.

The census I made in 1964 of land ownership and use by the 304 families living in the center of the township (Table 5) shows that 47 percent of the households have no land other than the ejido grant of one hectare. Because of the growing population, the land per household has decreased. A comparison with the 1958 census of land ownership of 280 households in the center indicates that 89 families now have less land than they had at that date, 72 have the same amount, and 44 have more land; 99 unknown cases include new families which have been created since the earlier date, families which were no longer in existence in 1964, and households in which there is a lack of data on the question of landholding.

The strong sentiment against the sale of one's own land, well documented in the monographic literature,[2] is expressed here:

If a man sells his land without sickness, people say he is lazy. The best thing to buy if you have money is land. Unlike cattle, it does not die, it does not get lost, and it does not need watching. It is not the same with a horse. When you buy one, you have to watch it and care for it and when it dies, all is over. You lose all your money. But with land, in two years you have the land paid for and it remains as a gift. It gives us what we eat.

Land is rarely sold to outsiders. If a man needs money and has a buyer from out of town, the civil authorities raise the money and buy the plot, selling it in pieces as they find buyers. Only one small plot of land has been sold to an outsider in my knowledge of the community. This plot

2. See Tax (1957), Wagley (1941). Oscar Lewis (1963:125 indicates that in Tepotzlan the breakdown of the resistance to selling land was associated with a growing awareness of profits to be made in the regional and national economy.

[TEXT CONTINUED ON PAGE 32]

8: Hunt E-4,5 (1958)1962 NV9 Tzeltal NV9
Amatenango
Aguacatenango

197 The inhabitants of both villages speak closely related dialects of the Tzeltal language, one of the two groups forming the Tzeltal-Tzotzil, which split linguistically from the parent stock of the Mayan Family around the beginning of the Classic Period of Maya Civilization (McQuown , 1959).

Lexicostatistical counts and isoglosses show that the two communities cluster together, in dialect cores of less than 500 years of separation, as against several others in the study area of the Chiapas Project of the University of Chicago. Several indices were used for the count, including degree of Spanish borrowing (McQuown, 1956; 1959). They indicate the same degree of linguistic acculturation.

191 At present Tzeltal-Spanish bilingualism is common, perhaps with the exception of elder women, although the Spanish spoken is mainly "market-Spanish" and reduced in vocabulary.

Demography

175 621 166 During the Colonial Period and the Independence both villages remained stable, being endogamous, economically self-sufficient communities with fairly restricted ranges of territorial movement; this is in contrast with the present day situation in which settlements tend to split into separate communities through local migrations (McQuown et al., 1959, Section 2, Part I, page 6).

175 161 A comparison of censuses available for the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries suggests a high degree of demographic continuity with a slow, steady increase in population, although there is some evidence of population declines which took place in the

175 area as a result of recurring epidemics. It has taken 180 years
161 for the villages to double their population while Mexico as a whole has tripled it in 144 years, from 1793 to 1937 (Simpson, W., 1937: 149).

TABLE 1

DEMOGRAPHY: POPULATION INCREASE

Year	Amatenango	Aguacatenango
1778	576	568
1958	1,337	1,034

621
166 More recently both communities have sent out some of their population to form colonias (small dependent settlements) in their rural periphery. Amatenango has formed four separate rural barrios (La Grandeza, Madronal, Yetahwitz and Patzhwitz) situated within view of the town, and two colonias (San Vicente and San Caralampio). Aguacatenango now has one colonia, called El Puerto. Most of its inhabitants are related to those of Aguacatanango; they moved down to El Puerto in the last thirty years, after the community lands had been expanded in that direction.

Political History

175
648 During Colonial times and the Independence period both villages shared the same types of relations with the outside world; these were mainly the payment of tribute in kind and services to the Spanish and Ladino (Local Mexican) authorities.

When first mentioned, the villages appear to have been

423 593 [432] [184] The reasons for keeping a son are not as pressing as the reasons for keeping a daughter. Amatenango land holdings are somewhat smaller than Aguacatenango, and the buying and selling of agricultural parcels, as long as it does not involve outsiders to the village, is a common practice which accounts for approximately 16 per cent of land transactions. The

423 241 592 464 limited land holding units in Amatenango require minimal cooperation in agriculture. Because of fractured land holdings, fewer than one-half of the households have two tablones . . . of land. Therefore, fewer than one-half the households can keep more than one man actively employed. Even in those households with from two to five tablones, a man and his adult son are sufficient labor for most activities except harvest. 592 323 434 868 [582] [178] Women's pottery production, however, requires frequent cooperation. Two tendencies are reinforcing the cooperation of women, especially of mothers and daughters: (1) with increasing need for cash income to buy products which are not longer produced in the home, or which have been introduced, money is constantly needed. Pottery offers an easy means of acquiring cash with almost immediate returns, and (2) marriages are currently contracted at a later age for girls than formerly. Before, about a generation ago, marriages at the age of eleven or twelve were the rule. Most of the intensive learning of pottery techniques begins at that age. Consequently, pottery was taught to the daughter by the mother-in-law if the girl was married and resided in the husband's house. (See Frans Blom and Oliver LaFarge [1927] who commented that all pottery was taught by the mother-in-law.) [114] Most marriages now are contracted for girls from 14 to 17 years of age. At this time they are already proficient potters, and accustomed to working with their mother. Therefore, there is a greater stress put on their remaining in or near their parental home after marriage (Nash, J., 1960:47).[1]

592 868 323 The people of Amatenango recognize that during the period in which a woman learns to make pottery, she establishes particular habits of cooperation and a strong solidarity bond with the woman from whom she learns and with whom she works. "Parents say that there is an advantage in early marriages, in that the girl would be more willing to learn the ways of her mother-in-law if she

---

[1] [161] It is also important to notice that with the increase in population over the area, the market has increased.